

SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

Solution-Defining: These questions help family members define who, what, where, when and how of the problem and the solution. It helps to identify the nature of the problem and the solutions, as well as who else is interested in this problem or has information that might be helpful in solving the problem. It helps to provide a video replay of how and under what circumstances the problem occurs. This is done by first asking the question such as "Under what circumstance is this likely to occur?" and then following up with the statement "*and then what happens*", and following that response to say "*and then what happens*". This sets the condition for the family member to provide a video replay of the circumstance under which the problem exists.

Examples include:

- Under what circumstances is this likely to occur?
- When this happens (your husband loses his temper and threatens the children), what do you do?
- What are the positives for you in continuing to stay in this relationship?
- Who else is concerned about this problem in your family?
- What would have to be different for you not to be afraid?
- How often did it happen last week?
- Who was there when it happened?
- Where were you when Johnny had his temper tantrum?

Past Successes: Through the interview process, you can focus on a family's past successes, that is, when the family member was functioning well enough not to require child protective services intervention. It is empowering to the family member to realize that there was a period in his/her life when s/he was more successful than s/he feels at this moment.

Examples of past success questions include:

- It's not easy to raise three children on your own. How did you do it?

- After having been through what you've been through, how did you find enough strength to keep pushing on?
- What do you need to do so that you'll feel good about yourself and in control of your life again?
- What would it take for you to bring back the confidence you had when you were in high school?

Exception-Finding Questions: In solution-focused interviewing, exceptions are times when problems could have occurred but did not. You and the family need to examine who did what, when, where and how so that the problem did not happen. Essentially, you are trying to discover how the patterns around the problems are different, especially what is different when the problem does not occur. In addition, problematic behaviors usually happen only within certain physical, relational or social contexts. It is important to find out in detail what happens when the person does not have the problem. That information can be used to identify the abilities the family uses successfully in one setting. Those strengths/abilities could be transferred to another setting. Examples of exception-finding questions include:

- I can see you have every reason to be depressed. When do you suppose you get a little bit less depressed?
- How would you say you are different when you are a little bit less depressed?
- When you force yourself to get out of bed and walk the kids to school, what do you suppose your children will notice different about you?
- What would it take to force yourself to get up in the morning more often?
- You are saying that you didn't drink for five days last week. How did you do it?
- Tell me what is different for you at those times when you don't lose control.
- How do you explain to yourself that the problem doesn't happen at those times?
- What would have to happen for you to do it more often?

When the problem is solved, how do you think your relationship with your son will be different? What will you be doing then that you are not doing now?

Miracle Questions: The miracle question literally asks family members to disregard their current troubles and for a moment imagine what their lives would be like in a successful future. It creates a vivid image or vision of what life will be like when the problem is solved and the family member(s) can see some hope that life can be different. The question is:

- Suppose one night there is a miracle while you are sleeping and the problem that brought you to child protective services is solved. Since you are sleeping you don't know the miracle has happened or that the problem is solved. What do you suppose you will notice that is different the next morning that will tell you the problem is solved? Follow-up questions include:
 - If the miracle happened, what will be the first thing you notice?
 - If the miracle happened, what will be the first change you notice about yourself?
 - What will your spouse notice different about you?
 - If you were to take these steps, what would you notice different around your house?

Minor miracle questions also help family members look at a more hopeful future. These questions help you and they envision positive outcomes that can become part of the change process. These questions include:

- If you had three wishes, what would they be?
- If you had a magic wand and could grant yourself one thing that would solve the problem/meet the need that your family is now facing, what would you wish for?
- If you could paint a picture for me of what your family would be like if all this were solved, what would that picture look like?

Scaling Questions: Scaling questions are an interesting way to make complex features of a person's life more concrete and accessible for both the family member and the child protection worker. Scaling questions can be used to assess self-esteem, self-confidence, investment in change, prioritization of problems, perception of hopefulness, etc. They usually take the form of asking the person to give a number from 1-10 that best represents where the family member is at some specific point. Ten is the positive end of the scale, so higher numbers are equated with more positive outcomes or experiences. Examples of scaling questions include:

- On a scale of 1-10, with 10 meaning you have every confidence that this problem can be solved and 1 meaning no confidence at all, where would you put yourself today?
- On the same scale, how hopeful are you that this problem can be solved?
- What would be different in your life when you move up just one step?

You can use scaling questions to assess a person's motivation to change.

- On a scale of 1-10, how much would you say you are willing to work to solve the problem?
- If they give a low answer you could ask: What do you suppose your husband would say that you need to do to move up one point on the scale?

Coping questions help you examine with people how they manage difficult times and things they might like to change but can't right now. Coping questions help you to find the areas of resiliency that support people in troubled times. These questions can also help you to identify the personal strengths and other resources that people use to cope and can use to make advances. Coping questions in combination with other questions such as the miracle questions or scaling questions can help you identify what needs to happen to keep coping in the most productive way.

Examples of coping questions include:

- What has and is making it possible for you to cope?
- How do you keep making it work for you and your family?
- Given the nature of everything going on in your life what keeps that smile on your face?
- I'm sure there are days you want to pack it up and leave. What helps you stay?
- There are lots things people are asking you to do for your children. What helps you meet those demands?